Bryn Mawr College
Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College

Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology Faculty Research and Scholarship

Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology

1979

Review of *Alexander The Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army*, by Donald W. Engels

Russell T. Scott
Bryn Mawr College, rscott@brynmawr.edu

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.brynmawr.edu/arch_pubs

 Part of the Classical Archaeology and Art History Commons, and the History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons

Custom Citation

Scott, Russell T. Review of *Alexander The Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army*, by Donald W. Engels. *Archaeology* 32, no. 5 (1979): 67.

This paper is posted at Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College. http://repository.brynmawr.edu/arch_pubs/151

For more information, please contact repository@brynmawr.edu.

Alexander The Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army

by DONALD W. ENGELS. *158 pages, 16 maps, 8 tables, bibliography.* UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, Berkeley, California 1978 $15.00

Throughout antiquity appreciation of Alexander the Great's conquest of Asia was widespread but uneven. Historical accounts of his campaigns, reliable by the standards of the times, circulated along with the manuals of ethnography, geography and tactics in which they were also recorded. A less critical tradition about his adventures, stigmatized by modern scholars as the "The Romance of Alexander," gained great currency over time. Indeed, the tendency of Hellenistic historians to view the course of events as determined by the personalities of the kings about whom and for whom they wrote, was itself an important aspect of the popular development.

So Alexander could emerge positively as the youthful, mysterious and irresistible figure for whom later generals were clearly no match: the biographer Suetonius had Julius Caesar weep in comparative frustration before Alexander's image; and Napoleon's Egyptian campaigns offer another source of comparison. Or, he could become the irrational, tragically-driven figure of destruction that he was for some philosophers—Seneca, for example.

His position in modern times has not been very different. General histories of the period concentrate on the man, celebrating the capacity for leadership manifested in his campaigns, but do not investigate their planning in much more detail than survives in the ancient accounts. Rather, it has been a specialized group of military geographers, some involved in the extension of the British Empire in Asia, who have taken up the problems of route, transport and supply which Alexander also had to solve to attain the success in war he did.

Engels' book aims at narrowing this division in the ancient and modern traditions by a careful reconstruction of the logistical arrangements in the armies of Philip and Alexander, and an analysis of how these were maintained in those areas of Asia where ". . . climate, geography, or lack of provisions may have been significant factors in influencing Alexander's strategic decisions." The results allow the modern reader to visualize in detail the Macedonian army on the move in a variety of landscapes, and also contribute to a fuller understanding of Alexander as a commander.

Engels' method is to establish a model of consumption rates, marching and transport capabilities under different conditions for soldiers, pack and cavalry animals, based on pertinent information from ancient sources and the premechanized English and American armies. These are correlated with Alexander's conduct of operations in Afghanistan, Anatolia, Egypt, India, Iran, Mesopotamia, Pakistan, Palestine, Soviet Central Asia and Syria, the archaeology, geography and climate of which regions are reviewed at appropriate length.

Measured by these standards, Alexander is shown to have been a purposeful wanderer and a methodical planner able to depend on capable subordinate officers in charge of intelligence and supply, something presumably as well understood by ancient military writers as by the geographers of this century on whose reconnaissances Engels relies. But his explicit demonstration is timely and the rexamination of the Macedonian army serves the scholar as well as the general reader.

For example, his study confirms that the history of Alexander written by Q. Curtius Rufus in the first century after Christ, despite the suspicions aroused by the rhetorical excesses of his speeches, is a knowledgeable source for the campaigns. The account of the Gedrosian desert expedition by the fleet admiral Nearchus is distorted to make Alexander, rather than inadequate intelligence, responsible for its disastrous course. And the clear dependence of Alexander on his subordinates, some of whom are known, must also be taken into account in any consideration of the difficulties that developed in his relations with the army during the Asian campaigns.

In his conclusion Engels invites others to test his method on other military operations of the past and quotes Sir Aurel Stein to good purpose: "The locality is the surviving portion of the reality of an event that has long ago passed by . . . it often restores to clearness the picture which history has preserved in half-effaced outlines." The utility of this work should certainly produce a response. The one inconvenient feature of the book, the result of its small format, is that the maps are not all of comparable detail to the geographical description and argument in the text.

RUSSELL T. SCOTT

Bryn Mawr College
Bryn Mawr, PA

Middle Classic Mesoamerica: 400–700 A. D.

edited by ESTHER PASZTORY. *170 pages, 64 black and white photographs, 39 text figures, 6 plans, 5 maps, 3 tables, bibliography.* COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, New York 1978 $20.00

This book is the result of a symposium held in 1973 at Columbia University, attended by various scholars convinced of the usefulness of a three-fold rather than two-fold division of the Mesoamerican Classic. The "Middle Classic" is a concept first formulated by Lee A. Parsons from his work at the Cotzumalhuapan site of Bilbao, Guatemala. It supposedly comprises the time span A.D. 400 to 700, and covers all of Mesoamerica; during it there was widespread cultural eclecticism, mixing of traditions and much intellectual as well as economic exchange. Whether others will follow the lead taken by Esther Pasztory, organizer of the symposium and editor of the volume, remains to be seen.

In an introductory essay, Pasztory sees this as a "period of fermentation, of brilliant achievements side by side with sudden collapse." In contrast, the Early and Late Classic were periods of relative isolation. Two later essays by Pasztory synthesize the art historical data from Teotihuacan, Oaxaca, Veracruz and the Maya area. According to standard chronologies, this was the time of the Teotihuacan style, when artistic, religious and, apparently, political influences from this great central Mexican city could be detected everywhere, even in the heart of the Maya lowlands. In one of the best papers in the collection, William Sanders proposes that male traders from Teotihuacan, probably organized into warrior guilds like the Aztec *pochteca,* had occupied foreign territories and taken native wives; this, he feels, is the best explanation for the Teotihuacan presence in sites as Kaminaljuyu. Arthur Miller argues that this influence was not simply one-way: while it is very much present in lowland Maya sites, there is specific Maya influence detectable in some Teotihuacan murals.

In an essay on the distribution in time and